

natsume yuujinchou novel translation

THE LITTLE FOX'S JOURNEY

chapter 1 ([translation notes](#))

this is a serialised novel that can be found online for free on the [hakusensha novel site](#), along with other series like *soredemo sekai wa utsukushii*, *ookami-heika no hanayome*, *shitsuji-sama no okiniiri* and *vampire knight*. it also has previews for other novelised manga. please take a look if you have the time!

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Original work: Midorikawa Yuki

Novel author: Murai Sadayuki

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Ginkgo nut, matsutake, akebia[1].

Red mushrooms cannot be eaten. If the frogs in the swamp clamour, it is a sign of rain.

There's nothing I don't know about this forest.

When the tree leaves are dyed with red, the location for fishing char moves just a bit downstream – ah, I've found chestnuts.

Mother, I'm living strongly. The little fox that cried all the time is no longer here. I've got a lot more power now, you know? Even with big branches like this that block the beast's road after being broken by the wind, I can easily... Oomph... See? I can easily move them out of the way. I can definitely be useful to Natsume now...

Natsume is a human who saved me when I was still a crying little fox. I met him when he came near this forest for something called a 'class-friend-ship-stu-dy-camp'[2]. Ah, even though Natsume's a human, he's a bit different.

At that time, Natsume had many human friends around him. Natsume smiled a lot with them... but it seems fake somehow...

– Maybe Natsume isn't a human... And is actually a fox like me... If that was true, he could just live with me. And I could teach him anything about the forest.

Then, when it was raining, he gave me a leaf umbrella. He had been smiling.

He said 'Thank you' to me.

Mother, I was useful. I'm not useless any more. So... when the ayakashi of the forest called me 'useless', I fought back properly.

I found this out from hearing to the ayakashi talk then, but Natsume was the owner of the Book of Friends! The Book of Friends. Those whose names are bound within it must treat the owner as their master. I'd never heard of it

before.

I wrote my name on a fallen leaf and gave it to Natsume. To tell him to make me his servant. Ah, I definitely didn't forget my pride as a fox though. I just wished in my heart to be useful to Natsume. But Natsume just put his hand on my head and smiled kindly.

'I don't want us to be bound by something like this. We're not master and servant, right? I think we have a different relationship.'

That's what he said.

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– What could that different relationship be?

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I still think about it now. What is that different relationship that Natsume talked about? I still don't understand, but if I become stronger, I'll definitely...

Natsume and Natsume's friends returned to a faraway town on the opposite side of the mountain. Many humans live there. Actually, I went there once on my own, you know? It was when I found a hat at the edge of the forest... Ah, the one-eye youkai and the cow-face ayakashi that always bully me. I'll talk about that story later. For now, I'll hide in this thicket.

Shuffle shuffle...

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'Oi, did you hear about that wandering ayakashi?'

'Ah, I heard, I heard.'

'I hear he left the forest to go down to the village where the humans live.'

'Ah, he left for the human village.'

'He was an interesting guy, but there's no helping it. He probably lives his life going from journey to journey without staying too long in one place.'

– What are they talking about?

'Anyway, he was a good storyteller. He told me a lot of stories about different lands. His story about being beaten by Natsume was the best.'

– Eh? Natsume?

'But that Natsume with the Book of Friends is a really frightening guy. He can see us even though he's a human, and on top of that, he's really strong.'

– They really are talking about Natsume!

'He's scary because he hits ayakashi at random when he spots them. What an ill-natured guy.'

– Natsume isn't ill-natured!

'He isn't just violent. He gives youkai impossible challenges to defeat them – he's a real scoundrel.'

– I can't forgive them for calling Natsume a scoundrel!

'Now that you mention it, when we were playing with the shorty fox, that Natsume with the Book of Friends suddenly punched us. He's as violent as the rumours say. Even though he looks so frail – what a frightening guy...'

– I can't let them badmouth Natsume any longer. Hey!

'You! Natsume won't forgive you!'

'Hm? If it isn't the useless shorty fox. What's with that frightening face?'

'I-I'm not useless!'

'Does he want us to hit him again? Hm? ... No, wait. Is that ill-natured scoundrel Natsume nearby again?'

'Natsume isn't ill-natured or a scoundrel! Take it back.'

I know best of all that Natsume is a kind-hearted human.

'Like I care. Complain to that wanderer. That's what he told us.'

'If he corrects himself, we'll take it back too.'

Urgh... Now that I thought about it, it's true. If that wan-der-er person is badmouthing Natsume everywhere, I need to stop him first.

'Where is that wanderer?'

'He isn't in this forest any longer. Well, he just left the mountain recently though, so he might still be at that village.'

'That village?'

'Come on, you can see the human village through the branches of those oak trees, right? That's the one.'

Ah... such a faraway village.

'Hahaha, we'd be able to get there and back before the sun sets, but it's probably impossible for a shorty fox like you.'

'T-that's not true! I can do it too!'

I said it without thinking.

'First of all, you don't know anything about the human village, right? You can go, but you'll just get lost and start crying.'

Urgh.

But I know quite a lot about humans.

In the past, Mother took me to a human town, right? At that time, Mother taught me about places where money is dropped, how to buy tickets, how to ride trains, how to walk on roads – you taught me a lot about the human world.

It's fine. I can do it too.

OK, I've decided!

'I'm going.'

'Eh? Is he serious?'

'Just stop it.'

'A fox that goes to a human village looking like itself would be caught right away – you don't know what awful things will happen to you.'

When I went by myself to meet Natsume before, I took a medicine that let me look like a human for only one day and went to the town. With how I look now, regular humans, unlike Natsume, should see me as a fox. I don't know what would happen if I went like this... But – but, Mother... I have to become used to the village where humans live, so that I can be useful to Natsume someday.

'Tell me in detail about that wanderer. Like how he looks and where he likes to stay.'

'He really plans on going...'

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That wanderer is a kamaitachi[3] named Sakurou. He wears an old, casual kimono with a weasel mask on his head, so I think I'll be able to tell it's him right away.

Now, I've left the forest and am heading to the human village. I'll meet Sakurou, ask him about Natsume and make him correct himself no matter what.

That village is much closer than Natsume's town, so I should arrive if I walk for half a day... Ah, the river's water is beautiful. I bet I could catch a lot of fish at the bottom of that rock on the opposite bank. Oh – no, no, I don't have the time to drop by... Ah, this is the station for the train I took when I went to see Natsume. I want to go see him again.

But right now, I'm still a kid that can't even turn into a human by myself. Patience, patience.

I wonder what Natsume's doing now. Is he still taking care of that ugly cat...

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Mother, this was when I picked up the hat at the edge of the forest.

A large ayakashi with a dog's face gave me medicine so that even normal humans could see me like this for a day, and I went to the town where Natsume lives.

When I arrived at the town with my hat on, the town was filled with many different smells.

With the help of the smell carried by the wind, I found Natsume at last. Natsume was at 'school', smiling with his human friends.

His smile then looked a bit different to me than the smile he had when I first met him in the forest.

It looked like he trusted the humans he was with more, since his smile seemed just a little less fake.

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Ah, thank goodness...

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So Natsume had friends he could smile with like that, even without me. When I thought that, I felt a bit sad, so I left silently.

And then –

'So it is the little fox from then.'

I heard a voice from behind me.

When I took a look, I saw Natsume holding out a hand towards me.

Mother, Natsume remembered me.

I burst into tears. As I cried, I told Natsume why I had come.

'I see, so you came to see me? Thank you.'

Natsume smiled at me kindly.

'You're great. When I was small, I never thought about doing anything, even when I was lonely or afraid. that might be why I didn't notice a lot.'

Then, he said this at the end.

'I'll see you off. I have to remember the way. I'll come find you next time.'

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Ah, I have tears in my eyes just from remembering it. When I think about Natsume, I become a crybaby again...

OK. I'm just going to think about finding the kamaitachi named Sakurou.

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Now, here's the human village. I need to be careful.

The poles there connected by ropes are called te-le-phone-pole. Dogs often pee there to mark their areas. I need to be careful so that nobody finds me. Since terrifying cars run along the roads made by humans, I need to walk on the side. I'll be fine if I'm careful and remember what you taught me, Mother.

I wonder where Sakurou is. I found out what he looks like, but I don't know his smell. What should I do... If he's a kamaichi, maybe he smells like a weasel.

Anyway, maybe I'll ask the ayakashi in this village about Sakurou.

'Excuse me, do you know the kamaitachi named Sakurou?'

'Sakurou? Never heard of him.'

'Do you know the kamaitachi named...'

'I'm busy! Go away, shorty fox.'

Ah, it's pretty hard to find him.

'Miss with the three eyes, do you know an ayakashi named Sakurou?'

'Ah, the ayakashi that was talking about being beaten to a pulp by that Natsume?'

'Yes! That's definitely the Sakurou I'm talking about.'

'That was an interesting story. That Natsume really is a scary human.'

– Sakurou's badmouthing Natsume here too!

'Where is that ayakashi!?'

'That guy's not in this village any longer.'

– Eh? It can't be.

'He left for the next town.'

The next town...

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The next town that the lady with three eyes told me about was just a bit farther away from here. It was a larger town that had more people in it.

'I hear Sakurou's spent more time living in the city, so it probably agrees with him,' said the lady with three eyes.

'That town has a big Inari shrine[4], so if you're a fox too, you might be able to get help.'

Mother taught me something before. 'I-na-ri-shrine' is a god that had a deep relationship with foxes.

What should I do?

If I go back now, the one-eye ayakashi and the cow-face ayakashi will make fun of me again. It'll probably take me until nighttime to get to the next town, no matter how I hurry. Foxes have good vision at night though. And it's safer at night, since there are fewer humans. OK, I've decided. I'm a man - once I've decided something, I'll see it through.

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I'll go straight to the next town.

The sun's already very low in the sky, dyeing it in beautiful colours... Ah, this isn't the time for that. I have to hurry.

Why are human roads so black and hard? The smell's strange too. There are white lines drawn in the middle.

Walking along this road with nothing around it by myself makes me feel lonely for some reason. I wonder if Natsume also walks on roads alone like this. I wish I could always walk beside him at times like that.

Ah, the sun's finally set... Ah, I see beautiful lights. The human town. I've reached the next town. Ah, there are people even at night. There are many cars. Human towns are bright even at night. Ah – a dog barked at me! I have to run!

The human town has a lot of square, boxy buildings, so I can't tell them apart I didn't think it'd be this big either. I wonder where in town I've walked up to. I wonder where the kamaitachi Sakurou is.

Ah, there are two fox statues there. They're sitting like they're protecting the shrine behind them, but I wonder why.

There's a sign that says INARI JINJA[5]. I wonder what it says? Maybe Sakurou is here. I'll climb the stairs and talk a look around the shrine.

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'Oi, little fox. What are you doing here?'

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Ah, that was surprising.

Eh? Who is it. He's wearing a fox mask.

'What, is it your first time seeing the Inari shrine?'

'I-na-ri-shrine? Is this the Inari shrine? Are you the god Inari?'

'Ahaha, I'm not the god Inari. I'm a fox that lives here as the god Inari's familiar.'

'Are you a fox too? Ah, that's right. Do you know about a kamaitachi named Sakurou in this town?'

'A kamaitachi named Sakurou? The wanderer that just came to this town? He's near the town hall's parking lot.'

'Thank you very much!'

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Town hall, town hall.

Ah, I wonder where the town hall is. I ran out without thinking, but I don't know anything about this time.

I'm tired. I want to drink water.

I'm worn out from walking all day. Ah, my feet hurt.

Oh, perfect. There's a box. I'll take a break inside.

What's with this place? It's really comfy.

I'm sleepy...

I'll sleep...

For just a bit...

-

'Hey, big brother! Look, look! How cute!'

'Where'd he get in from?'

'What is it, Kenichi, Hana?'

'Dad, a little fox is inside Shiro's doghouse.'

'A fox? Where'd it get in from?'

'He must've come from the mountain.'

'From that far? I wonder.'

'Maybe it's somebody's pet?'

'Right, let's ask around. Hana, Shiro's collar should be here, right? Bring that.'

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Mm... Mmm... Why's it so noisy... Ah, it's bright... Is it morning already... Eh?

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'Here, Dad. The collar.'

'Ah, it's awake, Dad.'

'Hana, don't touch it! It'll bite.'

'It's fine. It's still so small.'

-

... Human children? ... What? This ring around my neck... Ehh!? Have I... been caught by humans!?

* * *

The chuukyuu from Yatsuhara were the ones who told me that there was an ayakashi that knew Reiko-san.

'Lord Natsume, Lord Natsume – it's terrible. There's a youkai saying bad things about you.'

'A traveller has been going around talking about your evil deeds, Natsume-dono.'

'Evil deeds...'

'I don't know the details, but he's saying how Natsume with the Book of Friends is arrogant and violent.'

'Isn't that exactly right?'

'Nyanko-sensei, please keep quiet.'

He was probably talking about Reiko-san. If that was the case, that youkai probably had some sort of connection to Reiko-san. I wanted to hear that youkai's story.

'Where is that youkai now?'

'Natsume, you're not planning on meeting that impolite youkai, are you?'

'Oh, are you going to punish that impolite youkai? We of Team Natsume, Society of Dogs won't let him get away. Please let us accompany you.'

'I'm not going to fight! I just thought that I'd like to meet this ayakashi if he knows about Reiko-san.'

'I won't pay any attention if you hurt yourself by sticking your nose into something unnecessary again.'

Nyanko-sensei's reprimand made sense. I've hurt my heart countless times by carelessly involving myself with youkai, but I know now that it isn't all bad.

'So where is that youkai?'

'The youkai passing through Yatsuhara should know where that youkai is. We were asking them about him. Ah, we also heard the name of the insolent character who is badmouthing you, Lord Natsume – if I remember correctly, he is a kamaitachi named Sakurou.'

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Notes:

[1] In Japanese literature, the akebia is often mentioned to evoke the image of a pastoral setting.

[2] In Japanese, the little fox speaks only in hiragana for these characters, rather than kanji. Hiragana and katakana are syllabic, whereas kanji are logographic, so kanji is more difficult. The little fox often uses hiragana and katakana instead of kanji in his dialogue, just like a child who still does not know that many kanji. For example, while the cow ayakashi says 'scoundrel', 'ill-natured' and 'wanderer' in kanji, the little fox repeats it in hiragana and katakana. I've spaced out the words with hyphens where it works, but sometimes I've just translated it into regular English.

[3] A kamaitachi is a type of Japanese youkai that comes on a dust devil, cutting people using their nails. The word can also refer to the wound inflicted by the kamaitachi itself or a whirlwind. [Wikipedia](#) has drawings of the youkai which show the sharp sickle-like nails.

[4] An Inari shrine is a shrine for the god Inari, who is the god of foxes among other things. They are common in Japan. The head shrine is Fushimi Inari Taisha, which is the shrine famous for its many torii, as you can see on the shrine's [homepage](#).

[5] This is originally written in kanji, which the little fox can't read.

natsume yuujinchou novel translation

THE LITTLE FOX'S JOURNEY

chapter 2

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Original work: Midorikawa Yuki

Novel author: Murai Sadayuki

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2

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Something that made me happy and something that made me sad – Sakamoto Hana, Class 1-2

Something that made me happy is that a little fox came to my house. When I woke up, he was in Shiro's doghouse. Shiro is the dog I had before. My big brother said that the fox is somebody's pet. I hope that's not true. Dad said he'd ask the neighbours. After asking, nobody knew, so now we're keeping him.

* * *

Mother, this is the biggest mistake I've ever made.

I've been caught by humans. It looks like the place I chose to sleep was the house of the dog this family used to keep. But that dog died a long time ago, so only this little house was left behind.

The two children who owned the dog are a brother and sister. I think the older brother is called Kenichi and the little sister is called Hana. It looks like they plan on keeping me instead of their dead dog.

'Here, milk. Drink up.'

My tummy's grumbling... Just one mouthful... Lick... Ooh, it's yummy!

'Here, eat this too. It's just leftovers from yesterday though.'

OK, I can't fight with an empty stomach. Munch munch...

'Look, Brother! It looks like he likes it!'

'He must have been starving.'

The food from the humans was delicious.

'We need to name him.'

'I'll name him! Hm, he's still a little guy, so... Chibita!'

– I don't want a name like that!

'Hm, let's go with that then.'

– Eehhh!?

'Hey, Dad, can we keep Chibita inside?'

'It's OK, right, Dad? He's still small, so I'd feel bad if we left him outside.'

'That's true. He seems quiet anyway. Do you need a licence to keep a fox? I'll check with a vet I know later. Now, Kenichi, Hana, first you should take the fox to the bath and give him a good wash.'

'Dad, don't call him "fox". He's Chibita.'

'Oh, he's named Chibita? Then clean Chibita up so that we don't catch any bad germs or bugs.'

'Okaaaay!'

W-wha, ah, what are they... Ah, the warm water feels nice... Wha!? What's with these bubbles!? Stop it!

'Come on, Chibita, keep still!'

Ah, what terrible children. Eh? For some reason, my body feels refreshed.

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Inside the house, they take off my collar and let me walk around freely, but the house's doors and windows are locked so I can't get out.

The children in this house go to 'school' every day and dad goes to somewhere called 'com-pa-ny'. When the three of them leave, there's no more human presence in this house. It seems that those three are the only people who live in this house.

Mother, it seems that this house doesn't have a mother. The mother died a long time ago from an illness, leaving the two children behind. I heard a neighbour say that the father raised the two of them as a 'single dad'.

In the living room, they have something called a pho-to-graph. It shows their mother back when she was still alive.

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Ah... so humans can do something like this...

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The mother in the photograph is holding a baby Hana and has a hand on the shoulder of a young Kenichi, and she has a gentle smile... If I had a photograph of Mother, I... No, I can remember Mother's face just from closing my eyes, so I don't need a photograph. But, I... just a little, I... I felt jealous of humans... of Kenichi and Hana.

-

That day, when Kenichi and Hana came back from school, they put a collar on me and took me outside so that they could show me to their friends.

After we got to a place called a chil-drens-play-ground, four or five kids came and each patted me on the head.

'Ah, he really is a fox. Awesome.'

'He's so cute! His eyes are so round.'

I was the topic of conversation for a while, but then Kenichi tied me to a steel pole in the corner of the park and started playing something called 'tag' by themselves. I watched them vacantly.

It was a strange game. They choose one person to be it, and everyone runs away from them. If they're touched by the kid who's it, that child becomes it.

When the kid who's it comes running after someone, they run really fast, but everyone's smiling like they're having fun.

– I wonder if Natsume played tag when he was a kid.

I suddenly wondered about that. When I first met Natsume, even when he smiled with other humans, he didn't smile like this.

'Hey, you wanna play too, Chibita?'

Hana asked me that in the middle of their game.

'Brother, Chibita wants to play tag too.'

'Ahaha, of course he can't.'

'I wish you could play with us too, Chibita.'

Hana pet my head gently and then ran away again, because the kid who's it was coming.

* * *

Those passerby youkai said he met the kamaitachi named Sakurou in the town he were in before Yatsuhara. Maybe they got along because they were both wanderers, as Sakurou had talked freely about interesting things that had happened to him on his journeys. His stories about Natsume were especially funny because Sakurou used big gestures, according to the passing youkai. From what he said, Sakurou didn't seem like a dangerous youkai. After hearing his location, I decided to meet Sakurou the coming Sunday.

'Oi, Natsume, are you really going to meet that Sakurou guy? You don't even know if he's still in that town – you really go on your whims.'

'It would trouble me if there are strange rumours about "Natsume with the Book of Friends", and that Sakurou ayakashi might have his name in the Book of Friends still, right?'

'So you're planning on meeting him to give him his name back on purpose? What a nice guy.'

'To be honest, I want to hear stories about Reiko-san from that ayakashi too.'

While talking in the empty train, we headed for that town.

The town was near the forest where I met that little fox, but it wasn't connected by bus or train and was a bit far for a walk.

'What should I do? I want to see him, since it's been a while.'

'Don't be stupid. We don't have the time for that.'

'Yeah. There's no helping it. If I don't return for dinner, I'll make Touko-san and Shigeru-san worry again.'

'Let's find that kamaitachi Sakurou right away and then go home. I need to eat those leftover manjuu from Nanatsujiya.'

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When we reached the town, we were able to meet the ayakashi right away. Just as the passing youkai told us, he was staying at the parking lot for the town hall. He wore a weasel mask on his face and had two sharp sickles hanging on his back. He looked exactly like a kamaitachi. It is said that when a kamaitachi brandishes their sickles, it creates a wind, and he let me see that. He sliced through the air, and the wind cut through the poster on the town hall's bulletin board, surprising some people who were passing by.

'Ah, so you're that Natsume's grandchild... That Natsume is no longer here then.'

Sakurou let out a sad-sounding sigh.

'Sakurou, why do you call Reiko Natsume? Most of us call her Reiko.'

'Ah? Could you be Madara?' said Sakurou when he heard Nyanko-sensei's voice.

'Hm? Have we met? I don't remember you.'

'No, I've only ever seen you from afar, so you probably don't know me. But this is an amazing appearance. That Madara now looks like such an ugly pig cat. Ahahahahaha.'

'Natsume, can I eat this guy now?'

'Stop it, sensei.'

'I call Natsume Reiko by the name Natsume because that's what the people around her called her,' continued Sakurou, paying no attention to my conversation with Nyanko-sensei.

'Humans go to a place called school, right? I heard a girls of about the same age talking about how Natsume-san was scary and how it'd be better to keep away from Natsume-san.'

Sakurou, who have wandered to the town where Reiko-san lived, had seen her surrounded by some students who seemed like hooligans. It seems like they had made some unreasonable accusations.

When Sakurou saw that, he brandished his sickles and cut the clothes of the students around Reiko-san. He had just meant it as a little warning, but the students, in shock, had looked at Reiko. Then, Reiko-san had turned towards Sakurou and said just one thing.

'I won't forgive you...' she had murmured.

Under that pressure, Sakurou had run away, shaking. However, Reiko-san chased Sakurou for days after that, just as she had said she would, and beat him senseless once she caught him and made him her servant by getting him to write his name.

However, after Reiko-san made Sakurou her servant, she seemed to lost all interest in him. Sakurou, whose name wasn't called, instead watched Reiko-san from a distance as she made youkai into her servants. The stories he told about 'Natsume's evil deeds' were those that he had witnessed then.

'It was interesting when idiot humans got involved, like when she was competing with a powerful ayakashi that humans call a "man-eating inn". I think he was a male student from the same school Natsume was at. Madara, you took that boy all the way to the "demon's bed", didn't you?'

Nyanko-sensei just gave a curt 'Ah' in reply. He looked a bit displeased. It seemed he didn't like that somebody had been secretly watching Reiko-san and him together.

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Sakurou's stories about Reiko-san continued after that. For stories like how she had a swimming competition after pushing a youkai who couldn't swim into a river or how she had tidied up a forgotten god's shrine in exchange for working that god hard, it made me wonder how much could be true, but each one sounded possible, since it was Reiko-san.

It was almost time to return, so I suggested at the end that I return his name.

'Ah... Since you've come all this way, maybe I'll have you return it,' Sakurou said, sounding a bit lonely.

I took the Book of Friends in my head and brought up an image of Sakurou in my mind.

'One who protects me, show your name!' I prayed.

The Book of Friends flipped open, pages awhirl, and the page with the name written on it stood up. I took that in my mouth and shut my eyes.

– That moment, the memories of Reiko-san without Sakurou flowed into me like a torrent.

"What's up with that Natsume? She won't call my name even though she made me into her servant. I'm a wanderer that goes from journey to journey. If she won't call me, I'm going to go."

"Does Natsume have no place in this world? The same as me..."

"Then I'll find a place for her. I'm not doing it because I'm her servant. This is something I'm doing on my own."

Sakurou left that town, with the intention of returning immediately if he was called. In order to find a pleasant place for Reiko-san, he walked to a variety of places. Looking for a world where humans wouldn't resent or exclude other humans, a world where humans and youkai could live together without hurting each other, for years and years...

"If I find a place for Natsume, I'll stop my journeys too and stay there... That's what I thought as I continued my journey, but... This place isn't right... This town is no good either... Maybe there isn't a human town where that Natsume can live happily..."

"How many years have I been searching... How many years have I been waiting for her to call my name... What on earth have I been doing... Where is my own place in this world..."

Sakurou's pain came through to me, constricting my heart.

'Thank you, Sakurou, for thinking of Reiko-san...'

I clapped my hands together firmly and breathed out.

'I'll return your name... Accept it, Sakurou.'

The letters left the paper and fluttered over to Sakurou's forehead, which absorbed them.

Returning names always exhausts me. Since I was out of energy, Nyanko-sensei asked in my stead.

'What are you going to do now, Sakurou?'

'I no longer need to look for a place for Natsume, but... I'll think about staying in this town a little longer. And when I

feel like it, I'll probably leave on a journey again.'

Then, like he had just remembered:

'Ah, that's right, from now on, I'll also...'

'Hm?'

'When I talk about her, I'll call her Reiko instead of Natsume.'

After saying that, Sakurou sliced the air to cause a whirlwind, and he left along with the wind. Sensei and I put the town behind us and returned home, where Touko-san and Shigeru-san were waiting. On the train home, I realised that I had a place of my own now, and just managed to keep in the tears that welled up unconsciously.

* * *

Ah, how many days has it been?

What on earth am I doing?

-

Mother, since the humans bring food every day, I don't need to hunt any more. But...

It's boring being in this house with nobody in it.

At some point, I started looking forward to when Kenichi and Hana return from school. When I hear their footsteps from far away, I feel excited. Ah, won't they take me to the park again? Won't they let me see them playing tag with Kazuki and Sakiko and Tsubasa again?

The wind is pretty strong today... Ah, I wonder if the branches of the pine trees in the forest are rustling. I wonder if the water in the pond at the bottom of the mountain is sparkling, with ripples on the surface.

Ah, the window made a loud sound... Ahh! The window broke!?

-

'Hm... Ah, you really were here, little fox.'

Eh?

The window had a line across it, like it had been cut by something round and sharp. Just as I thought the window had cracked, a strange shape came in from the small hole!

'Are you the little fox that was searching for me?'

eh? Who is this? He has a weasel mask on his face with two sickles in his hands...

'... Er, could you be the kamaitachi named Sakurou!?'

'I am. The familiar at the Inari shrine told me that a little fox came to this town searching for me. When I told him I hadn't seen you, he was pretty worried, y'know?'

'That familiar was?'

'So now you're being kept by humans. How nice.'

'T-that's not it. I'm just staying here for them!'

'Hm... Well, that's fine too. Whether you're an ayakashi or a beast, you have to return the favour for a night's lodging and meal.'

'A night's lod-ging and meal?'

'They let you stay here and feed you, right? That's a night's lodging and meal. I'm a wanderer, but if somebody does me a favour, I always return it before heading to the next town. Well, it looks like you've had many nights of lodgings and meals, but... It's just an example. Don't worry about the number.'

Though I'm not a traveller, I think what Sakurou said makes sense. Mother also told me that if somebody helps me, I have to thank them somehow. Just like how I thanked Natsume with mushrooms and fish when he saved me, I need to do something to thank the people at this house somehow...

-

– But what on earth should I do?

-

Ah, more importantly, there's something I have to tell Sakurou!

'Sakurou, why are you saying bad things about Natsume? Natsume's a really nice human.'

'Ah? Shorty, you know Natsume? ... No, there's no way.'

'I came to here to stop you saying bad things about him.'

'Wait... Is the Natsume you know the frail-looking boy? If that's the case, I'm talking about a different Natsume.'

'Eh?'

'I just met the Natsume you know earlier. I was talking with him.'

'Ehh!? You met Natsume!? When? Where?'

'Just earlier, in this town.'

'Is Natsume... Is Natsume still in this town!?''

'Of course not. This was several days ago. He's already returned to the town he lives in.'

What... Of course. Natsume has many friends in that town...

'Well, don't look so disappointed. You'll get to meet him again if fate means for it to happen. There just wasn't any fate in play with me and my Natsume...'

What does he mean? Why do Sakurou's eyes look so sad when he says 'Natsume'?

'Rumours are frightening things. Nobody would think I was badmouthing Natsume if they heard me directly.'

'Eh?'

'Relax. I won't call her Natsume any longer. But you really are an astonishing fellow. You braved all that danger and came to this human town to meet me?'

'Natsume is an important person to me...'

'I see... Come to think of it, it's like that for me too. So what are you going to do now?'

'What am I going to do?'

'I've decided to leave on a journey again. Well, that's my personality. Are you going to stay here and live with the humans? Or do you want to return to the forest?'

'I...'

What do I want to do? What should I do?

'Well, I think you can just keep here as a pet. You don't have to worry about food. But if you say you want to leave, I'll make another hole in the window for you. I'll leave for the next town after that, so decide before the humans come back. Where is your place in the world?'

My place in the world?

'Bye.'

'Ah, wait...'

He left...

-

'We're back, Chibita!'

Ah, the two of them are back...

'Ah! Brother, look! There's a hole in the window!'

'You're right. Maybe Chibita broke it?'

'Eh? Chibita, are you OK? You're not injured, right?'

Ah, these kids are really kind. The first thing they do is worry about me. If I leave, they'll probably be sad. It might be better for me to stay here. But...

natsume yuujinchou novel translation

THE LITTLE FOX'S JOURNEY

chapter 3

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Original work: Midorikawa Yuki

Novel author: Murai Sadayuki

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It's nighttime now.

The window that Sakurou cut has been covered with card paper by Dad as an e-mer-gen-cy-mea-sure. But when tomorrow comes, Sakurou will probably open it again. Sakurou will be leaving after that, so if I want to escape, I have to do it tomorrow. I need to decide before then.

I wonder what Sakurou meant when he said a place of my own... Is it different from where I want to be? If it's where I want to be, it's by Natsume's side, but since I'm still weak... I'll become stronger and stronger... to do that, I can't stay here, can I?

-

'Big brother, I wonder if Chibita wants to return to the forest.'

— Eh?

'Why do you think that, Hana?'

'If Chibita broke the window, maybe he was trying to get out.'

'Dad said it wouldn't be broken like that if it was him, right? But if Chibita said he wanted to go back to the forest... what would you do, Hana?'

'I... want to be with Chibita forever.'

'Right, me too.'

— Ah, Hana, Kenichi...

'Big brother, can I sleep with Chibita in my bed today too?'

'Yeah, that's fine.'

'Here, Chibita. Let's sleep together, OK?'

Don't hug me so kindly, Hana. It hurts.

'I'll tuck you in.'

Ah, it's fluffy and warm. It smells nice, like Hana.

'Good night, Chibita.'

– Good night, Hana, Kenichi... Sorry, I'll be leaving tomorrow.

* * *

'We're heading out!'

'We're going! It's Saturday today so we'll be able to come back soon, Chibita.'

They're gone.

Ah, there was a crack sound just now. Sakurou broke through the paper covering the glass and made the hole even larger.

When I looked, Sakurou was already gone. He must have left for the next town.

Me too... Now, let's go! Hey!

Ah, the town is lively in the day. There are a lot of cars.

The boxy buildings that all looked the same to me when I came actually all have different shapes, now that I look carefully. This is the road I was lost on when I first came here. If I just go forward... There, the road that goes straight to the next village. The forest I'm returning to is ahead.

Now, let's go!

-

I'm walking one step at a time.

I'm heading for the forest one step at a time.

Why do my feet feel so heavy on the way back...

-

Ah, Mother, little foxes really are still crybabies.

After that, I stopped in the middle of the road and was drawn back to the town, but I couldn't go back to the house, so I spent a night in an empty lot at the edge of town.

The reason why I didn't return to the forest was that I remembered Sakurou's words. That's right. I haven't returned the favour for a night's lod-ging and meal yet. If I go back to the forest without returning the favour, I'll sully the name of the fox.

Ah, but what should I do?

When I thanked Natsume, I brought him mushrooms and fish, but I can't do that here, since it's not a forest. How can I return the favour to Kenichi and Hana?

Just when I was thinking about that and wandering the town, mother, something like a miracle happened.

Eh? This smell...!

I smelt a human coming closer to me. A very familiar smell, the smell of a person I really wanted to see.

'Ah, here! Sensei! He's here!'

– Natsume!? But there's no way... Ah, it's Natsume! It's really Natsume!

'Natsume!? Natsume! Why are you here!?!'

'I'm here too, shorty fox.'

'Ah, the ugly cat.'

'Can I eat him this time, Natsume?'

'Stop it, Nyanko-sensei. But I'm really glad. You got free, right? I came since I was worried after hearing that you got caught by humans.'

'Ah... Why do you know about that?'

'You probably know the kamaitachi named Sakurou. He went out of his way to come by when he was going to the next town and told Natsume.'

'Sakurou did...'

Then, we sat on a bench on the edge of town and ate the onigiri that Natsume bought together. As I ate, I explained why I was here. I don't know how much got across since I spoke in a hurry, but Natsume listened until the end.

'I see, returning the favour for a night's lodging and meal.'

'Sakurou's a real proper guy. You don't have to listen to what a guy like that says, shorty fox. If you want to go back to the forest, go back. But I think another good choice is to let those humans keep you, y'know?'

'...'

-

What should I do, Natsume?

-

'Hm... To be honest, I don't know which is the right choice... but it'll be difficult to return the favour.'

After thinking for a while, Natsume told me what he was thinking.

'Right... Do you remember when we first met?'

'Eh? Ah, yes.'

Of course I hadn't forgotten.

'When I saved you from the other ayakashi, you gave me mushrooms, right? And you gave me an umbrella when it was raining. That was useful, but even if it wasn't useful, I think I would've been happy.'

Happy even if I wasn't useful?

'This answer might not be useful at all... but thanks are a way to convey your feelings, right? Though I can't express it clearly.'

Oh, that's right.

'Thank you, Natsume! You were really useful!'

'That so?'

Natsume smiled again.

'Natsume, I'll definitely return the favour before going back to the forest, so when you come see me again, please come to the forest.'

'I see... I got it. But don't do anything dangerous, OK?'

'Yes!'

I saw Natsume and the kitty off to the station and then said goodbye.

'See you, and take care.'

'You take care too, Natsume! Goodbye.'

I want to be with him forever, but this is goodbye for now. I still have things to do in this town. In order to do what I have to, I ran to the Inari shrine.

-

'Familiar of the god Inari! Are you here?'

'What is it, fox child?'

'I have a request. Could you teach me how to pretend to be a human?'

'Oh, the method to pretend to be a human? Why do you want to pretend to be a human?'

'I want to say thank you to some humans.'

'Thank you? From a fox to humans?'

'Yes, I want to say thank you in words that humans will understand.'

'Oh... I see.'

'I don't have much experience, but I'll do my best to learn!'

'But I don't know the method to pretend to be a human either.'

'Eh? But your appearance.'

'This appearance does look human to humans as well, but that's the power of this mask from the god Inari.'

'I see...'

'Those protected by the god Inari look like humans only when wearing this mask. There are many stories of foxes pretending to be humans, but there are probably some who have help. But actually, I was taken in by this shrine

when I was still a child, so I don't know how to pretend. I'm sorry.'

What should I do?

'But if you work for just one day at this shrine, I could lend you this mask.'

'Really!?'

'Hahaha, I'll take a day off while you do that and go back to my old forest for the first time in a while. Then we'll be even.'

'Thank you very much!'

The day after, I did work for the god Inari, just as promised.

I did things like sweeping the garden and helping an old lady who became tired on the stone steps.

Then, the next day came.

* * *

I put on the mask from the god Inari... There. Now, I'll look like a human child even to humans other than Natsume.

Now all I have to do is wait for Kenichi and Hana to come to this park.

The sun is setting. It's almost time for school to end. They'll go home, put down their bags, and... ah, they're here.

-

'Hana, don't keep crying forever.'

'But Chibita won't come back...'

'We couldn't find him. He must've gone back to the forest.'

'Did Chibita hate our house that much?'

– That's not it, Hana.

'Oi, Kenichi, Hana-chan, let's play tag.'

'OK! Let's go, Hana.'

Kazuki and Sakiko and Tsubasa came too.

'Rock paper scissors! OK, Sakiko's it.'

'OK! One, two, three, four, five...'

'Run!'

I saw everyone playing tag that day too... Ah, Hana, watch out. Behind you, behind you... Ah, she got touched. Chase them! Ah, she fell. Be careful!

'Time out, time out! Let's take a break!'

'Ah, Kazuki that's not fair. You're just doing that because I almost caught you.'

'That's not it... Look, there's a strange kid over there.'

'Eh?'

Ah, everyone's looking at me.

'What a strange kid. He's wearing a fox mask.'

'I noticed too. He's been looking this way since earlier, so he must want to play with us.'

'What should we do?'

'We're fine with it. Right, Hana?'

'Yup.'

'Oi, masked kid over there! Do you want to play with us too?'

– I do.

'OK, then come over here.'

– Thank you, Kazuki.

'If you leave the park, you're out. Got it?'

'Got it.'

'Then let's start again. OK? Rock paper scissors!'

– Scissors! Ah, I lost.

'Then the masked kid is it, OK? Let's run!'

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!' OK, I'm coming! Ah, Sakiko's a bit slow!

'Got you!'

'Ah!'

Now I have to run!

'Wait!'

Mother, tag is much more fun to play than to just watch.

The human children are smiling, and when I smile too, it's like we're all friends.

I want to do this forever, but the fun time passed in a flash, and soon the colour of the sky told me the day was ending...

-

There was a siren from the nearby town hall.

'That's it! Kenichi was it at the end.'

'Argh.'

'Big brother, you're weak.'

Ah, Hana laughed a little.

'Excuse me, everyone. I must return.'

'Ah, that so?'

'Hey, take off your mask and let us see your face. Let's play again.'

'I can't do that.'

'Oh...'

'I had a lot of fun today. Thank you very much.'

And, I have to say this at the end.

'Um... Don't worry about Chibita.'

'Eh?'

'Do you know Chibita?'

'Yes, he's doing well.'

'Ah, could you be his old owner? So Chibita really was a pet.'

'No, I think Chibita's going to return to the forest. He said thank you to you all. Thank you very much.'

'Eh? You're a liar. Foxes can't speak.'

'It isn't a lie. There will be proof when you return home. Please look at the place where you first found Chibita. Chibita's thanks are there.'

'Where we first found him?'

'Now, I must leave.'

'Ah.. Wait!'

'Goodbye.'

-

Goodbye, Kenichi, Hana...

I ran without turning around. I climbed the steps to the Inari shrine, said thank you to the god Inari, placed the mask at the altar and went home.

Mother, I've finally returned to the forest.

It's already autumn in the forest.

Ah, the thanks I left Kenichi and Hana is something I got from working at the Inari shrine . I hope they'll like it.

I might never meet those two again, but... But if I become an adult that can pretend to be a human, I'd like to go see them in secret and play tag with them again.

* * *

Something that made me happy and something that made me sad – Sakamoto Hana, Class 1-2

Something that made me happy is that a little fox came to my house. When I woke up, he was in Shiro's doghouse. Shiro is the dog I had before. My big brother said that the fox is somebody's pet. I hope that's not true. Dad said he'd ask the neighbours. After asking, nobody knew, so now we're keeping him.

We all thought of a name together. I decided on Chibita. I called him Chibita because he's still small. He's small and cute.

But Chibita only stayed with us for six days. He broke the window and ran away. I cried. That's what made me sad.

A while after that, a strange kid with a fox mask said that Chibita returned to the forest and is doing well. Big brother said that was a lie, but the kid with the fox mask said there was proof. The kid with the fox mask had the same smell as Chibita.

When we went home, there were ginkgo leaves in Shiro's doghouse. The large ginkgo leaves from the Inari shrine.

I'd be happy if Chibita's doing well in the forest.

I still love Chibita now.